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Gray, Rev

Mission Herald
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INDIANS WEST OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.—On the 13th of March, the instructions of the Prudential Committee were delivered by one of the Secretaries of the Board, to Rev. Messrs. Elkanah Walker, and Mrs. Walker, from the state of Maine, Cushing Eells and Mrs. Eells from Massachusetts, and Asa B. Smith from Vermont, and Mrs. Smith from Massachusetts, and Mr. William H. Gray and Mrs. Gray from the state of New York. These families are destined to the Indian tribes on the Columbia river, Mr. Gray having previously spent a year in connection with the mission there, from which he returned last autumn. The services on the occasion were held in the Brick Church in the city of New York. Besides the instructions and appropriate devotional exercises, an address was delivered by the Rev. Dr. Spring.

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MISSION TO THE INDIANS WEST OF THE
ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

THE meeting held in the Brick Church, New York, preparatory to the departure of the Rev. Messrs. E. Walker, C. Eells, and A. B. Smith, and Mr. W. H. Gray, and their wives, destined to reinforce the mission among the Indians west of the Rocky Mountains, was noticed at page 237. Some portion of the instructions of the Prudential Committee delivered on that occasion will be given here.

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The country to which you are going may be approached by two routes—the one being by water, around Cape Horn, and is nearly the same as that to the Sandwich Islands. Indeed vessels bound to the North West coast usually touch at those islands first, and then proceed on their way, about two thousand miles, to the mouth of the Columbia river or De Fuca's straits; making the whole voyage about seventeen thousand miles; and occupying, including the usual detention at the Sandwich Islands, eight or ten months. In addition to the time and expense required for so long a voyage, the mouth of the Columbia river is difficult of entrance during a large part of the year, on account of a heavy swell of the sea off that coast, and the intricate and changing character of the channel.

The other method of approaching the country is to cross the prairies and mountains which lie

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west of our frontier settlements. This is the route which you contemplate pursuing. In accomplishing this journey, you will make your way in the usual means of conveyance to Independence, one of the western villages on the Missouri river, where you will join the caravan of the traders going to the mountains, and make arrangements for passing the almost boundless wilderness which will then open before you. Furnished with horses to ride upon, and pack-horses carrying tents to shelter you, food to subsist upon, utensils for cooking, and the bedding and clothing which are indispensable to your comfort, you will commence a pilgrimage, which, for three or four months, and through a distance of from 2,000 to 2,500 miles, will subject you to an untried, and in some respects, an unpleasant mode of life. The shelter, and the quiet apartments of a comfortable house, either by night or day, you must temporarily forego; you must look for no well furnished table, no permanent resting place, and none of the security and retirement of home. Christian intercourse, beyond your own circle, you cannot expect; nor can you summon, whenever you wish, many of the resources of civilized life to minister to your comfort, or to relieve the dreary and wearisome monotony of your way. Still, even this deprivation and exposure, these daily changes, this continual progress may teach a useful lesson, by impressing more vividly on your mind an image of the toils and barren wastes of this fleeting life, and leading you to bear all its burdens with more composure, in view of the quiet and satisfying home towards which you are rapidly hastening.

Your course will be somewhat north of west, and for the first week or two of your progress, the monotony of the scene will occasionally be broken by meeting with bands of Indians, or traders; and you may be cheered by a hasty interview with christian brethren at the three or four missionary stations near which you pass before leaving Council Bluffs, the last point of civilization near our frontiers. Nor will your journey be wholly without interest when you shall have passed the abodes and the works of man. You will then have the works of God to gaze upon, if not in their grandest and most varied, yet perhaps in their loveliest aspect. The interminable prairies, clothed in beautiful green, and adorned with flowers of every form and hue, the surface every where so gracefully undulating, and occasionally rising gradually into eminences which seem to mingle with the sky, and the strips of woodland skirting the water-courses or crowning the hills, present a landscape on which the eye is never weary of gazing. Before reaching the mountains, however, the trees on the streams become more scattered and nearly disappear, the prairie grass wears a stunted appearance, and large tracts must sometimes be traversed which are sterile and bare. When you reach the mountains the whole scene changes, and nature assumes a most varied and magnificent aspect.

On the route commonly traveled by the trading caravans, which is along the northern branch of the Platte river, the main ridge of the Rocky Mountains, where the waters flowing into the Atlantic are separated from those flowing westward into the Pacific, is crossed between the 29th and 30th degree of longitude west from Washington, and about the 44th parallel of latitude. At this point, while passing through the grand defile, you are supposed to be about

10,000 feet above the ocean level, while you look up on either hand to snow-capped peaks rising 8,000 or 10,000 feet above you. Indeed some of the peaks near this pass are estimated by scientific men [Prof. Renwick of Columbia College] to be not less than 25,000 feet above the ocean level, and thus surpassing all other mountains on the globe, except the highest points of the Himalayah chain in Central Asia. The highest land in North America is probably to be found in this vicinity, as the head waters of the Missouri, the Colorado, the Columbia, and Nelson's rivers, flowing in opposite directions and to different oceans, are found here. This defile in the mountains is somewhat more than half the distance from the Mississippi river to the Pacific. Thus far you will have passed over a level or gently undulating country, rising to your great elevation so gradually as scarcely to perceive that you were not on a horizontal plane. You will indeed have passed along the base of the Black Hills and some other spurs from the principal ridge, on your right; but on the western side of the great ridge the whole aspect changes, and you will find yourself encompassed by steep and lofty mountains, through the deep cuts of which you will wind your way. On either side of the Snake river, the southern tributary of the Columbia, upon whose waters you now come, you find two mountain chains stretching away to the west, from each of which innumerable spurs strike off towards the river. Many of these are covered with perpetual snows; and with their white tops and the barren precipices which compose their bases, and the unbroken solitude and desolation which reigns around them, present a scene of gloomy grandeur, to which there is probably no parallel on this continent. This mountainous region continues, embosoming, however, many extensive and fertile valleys, till you arrive within about 150 miles of the ocean, when you cross the last ridge, stretching from the Columbia river, nearly parallel with the coast, southerly towards California, and northerly towards Nootka Sound. The passage of this mountain tract usually occupies about two months, during which the eye and the mind are feasted with objects of novelty and grandeur which do not permit curiosity to sleep for a moment. You still find, however, the same destitution of trees, and to a great extent, instead of the refreshing verdure and flowers which closed the face of the earth over most of the distance from our frontiers to the Black Hills, you will find the surface composed of sand or broken stones, bearing no kind of vegetation except a bitter sedge of a dead and dreary appearance, with here and there small grass plats, and a few willows on the banks of the streams, occurring, as if by a special arrangement of providence, about often enough to be resting places at noon and night for the weary traveler and his beast.

The general barrenness which prevails in the mountains is doubtless owing principally to the destitution of moisture. Through the country, from the eastern base of the mountains till you arrive at the Pacific, the earth is seldom refreshed by a shower from July to October, and through most of the mountainous region no dew falls, and no cloud obscures the rays of the sun.

The country which you enter as you cross the Rocky mountains, and which is to be the scene of your labors, may be regarded as extending from east to west through twelve or sixteen de-

grees of longitude, and from the Mexican possessions in latitude forty-two, to an undetermined boundary separating it from the Russian colony on the north, about the fiftieth or fifty-fourth degree of latitude, and embracing nearly 300,000 square miles. Most of this territory, excepting a strip about two hundred miles in breadth along the coast, is destitute of forests, and much of it is so broken by mountain ridges, steep precipices, and deep ravines, and is withal so barren as to render it unfit for cultivation or the abode of civilized men. As you approach within four or five hundred miles of the Pacific, you will find on some of the rivers extensive valleys with a fertile soil, and well adapted, when subjected to human industry and skill, to be the abode of happiness and plenty.

The geological structure of the mountain region seems to be generally regarded as indicating volcanic action; and it is said that in some parts of it there are marks of craters which probably have not been many centuries extinguished. The vast piles of basaltic rock, extending, with occasional interruptions, many hundred miles along the Snake and Columbia rivers, the boiling springs which the traveller frequently meets with, the precipitous character of the mountains, the fractured stone which sometimes covers the surface for a great extent, and the many rivers and streams which lose themselves in the earth, indicate that the territory has been subjected to some violent commotions.

The soil, from the ocean as far back as the falls of the Columbia, and in most of the valleys and on the water courses, is of the most productive character, yielding in abundance of the grains, fruits, and every kind of vegetable common to temperate climates. As a grazing country, it is probably unequalled by any other in the same latitude, on the continent. The climate is far less severe and variable than in the latitude on the east of the mountain. Although the mouth of the Columbia is near the forty-seventh parallel of latitude, snow is seen there but in small quantities and for short periods; and so little power has the frost, that the ploughman is seldom incommoded by it during any part of the winter. Horses, multitudes of which are found in the country, and all kinds of cattle, find abundance of food through the year without care from man. The most marked variations of climate during the year are the dry season, embracing three or four months, from July to October, during which rain seldom falls, and the wet season of about as many winter months, during which rain falls abundantly.

The only rivers of considerable magnitude, which water this extensive tract, are the Columbia and its tributaries; the two principal of which are Lewis' river, often called Snake river, issuing from the mountains on the southeast, and Clark's river, proceeding down from the northeast. These two, having united their waters about 450 miles from the Pacific, constitute the Columbia river—a noble river which will admit ships of 300 tons to the junction of the Multnomah, 140 miles from the ocean, and smaller vessels about 180 miles, to the head of tide waters. Above this its current is broken by rapids and narrows, and often hemmed in for long distances by precipices of perpendicular rock, hundreds of feet in height, presenting the most picturesque appearance, and forming nearly an impassable barrier between those residing within call of each other on its opposite shores.

The history of the country west of the mountains, so far as it has been known to the civilized world, is brief. Previous to the year 1790, the coast adjacent to the Columbia river was an unknown land. During that year captain Gray of Boston, made a trading voyage along the shore and entered the river. Between the years 1803 and 1806, Lewis and Clark explored the country under the auspices of the United States government. In 1811 the first white settlement in the territory was made by Mr. Astor, the enterprising and successful pioneer in the fur trade, near the mouth of the Columbia. This establishment, after having cost an almost incredible amount of hardship and suffering, and much loss of life, was taken by the British in 1813; and the whole country, especially that portion lying near the ocean, has been in the almost exclusive possession of trading companies from that nation to the present time; though traders from the United States have, within the last few years, crossed the mountains and established a number of posts on the western slope. The two principal posts of the British Hudson's Bay Company which you will find, are Fort Wallawalla on the Columbia river, about 300 miles from its mouth, and Fort Vancouver, about 200 miles further down the same river. These, you will be happy to learn, are not only extensive trading and agricultural establishments, indicating in their whole appearance the presence of the arts and comforts which belong to civilization and refinement; but, owing to the excellent regulations according to which they are conducted, and the exemplary character of most influential persons concerned in them, they have exerted a salutary moral influence on the Indian bands in their neighborhood.

Within the last few years a new interest seems to be awakened among our citizens in regard to this extensive and important country; and probably, if the political relations of it were settled definitely, colonies would be established there with little delay. But by a convention made in the year 1818, between the British government and that of the United States, and renewed in 1827, it was agreed that the territory west of the mountains should be left open to the citizens of both nations for the space of ten years. That period has now expired without a renewal of the stipulation, or any arrangement having been made by either government for taking a more formal possession, or exercising jurisdiction over the disputed territory. What the resolutions recently introduced into our own Congress may result in is uncertain. There can be little doubt, however, that at no distant day flourishing settlements, the germs of a great and powerful nation, will be seen scattered along the shores of the Pacific, and through the fertile valleys of the interior. The mildness of the climate, the fertility of the soil, and the abundance and variety of its productions, the forest of valuable timber which abound along the coast, the excellent fish which fill the rivers, and the openings for trade, especially for the productions of such a country, which abound in almost every part of the Pacific and Indian oceans, obviously mark out this territory as the seat of nation of great commercial importance.

But it is the aboriginal population of this territory in which you are specially interested, and to whose benefit you are consecrating your lives. The Committee call your attention to the natural features and capabilities of the country, to the attractions which it holds out to en-

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terprising foreign settlers, to its political relations, and the prospect of its future importance as embracing a commercial and powerful nation, for the purpose of pressing on your minds the more deeply the critical situation of the present occupants of the soil, and leading you to make more prompt and strenuous exertions, and to offer more fervent prayers, that the gospel may have free course among them before the intercourse of unprincipled men shall corrupt them by their vices, or the grasping hand of avarice shall despoil them of their lands, and either exterminate them at once, or by successive steps, perfidiously drive them, filled with prejudice against all who bear the name of white men, back to the mountain fastnesses, almost inaccessible to christian benevolence.

Respecting most of the tribes occupying the country to which you are destined, we possess little information worthy to be relied upon. When first visited, in 1790, the country, especially along the coast, was regarded as being populous for an Indian country; and though the numbers were undoubtedly diminished by the wars provoked by the traders, and by the diseases, the murderous weapons, and the more murderous liquors, which were introduced among them from this source, yet large tribes were then found along the shores. Lewis and Clarke, however, suppose that at least fifteen years earlier than the date first named, the small-pox, that destroyer of every savage people which it visits, and which is even now said to be depopulating whole tribes east of the mountains, had swept over most of these western tribes. The old Indians, seared by the disease, told the mournful tale, and pointed out the ruins of villages, then visible, which had been thus unpeopled. These explorers enumerate thirty-nine tribes, which they visited, or of which they received accounts, embracing in all about 80,000 souls. This estimate probably embraced but a part of the tribes occupying the country west of the mountains, which is usually regarded as belonging to the United States; and with respect to the numbers of these, can be considered but an approximation to the truth.

The Rev. Mr. Parker, who visited the country two years ago, under the direction of the Board, mentions nineteen tribes residing between the mountains and the falls of the Columbia, embracing about 20,000 souls; and between thirty and forty bands below the falls, and stretching along the coast between the forty-second and fifty-fifth parallels of latitude, numbering about 35,000; making the whole Indian population between those parallels, and west of the mountains, about 55,000. But in these estimates also, nothing more than an approximation to accuracy can be expected. All recent travelers agree that six or eight years ago another wasting disease swept along the coast, cutting down from one half to three quarters of many tribes, and leaving others almost extinct. The terrible disease which is now raging among the tribes on the head waters of the Missouri, and northerly towards lake Winnipeg, according to recent intelligence, which appears to be entitled to credit, has probably proved fatal to 25,000 of these neglected and injured men, sweeping them from their beautiful prairies by thousands at a stroke. The overflowing scourge is now passing through, and who can tell where it shall be stayed? What the Lord proposes to do with this unhappy race is known only to him. He brought us to their shores, bearing in our hands

the gospel, and all the other means requisite to secure to them intelligence and happiness in this life, and holiness and salvation in the life to come; he has kept them lying as it were at our doors for two centuries; given us access to them and influence over them, to see whether we would stretch forth our hand to befriend and save them; and after waiting long, and seeing that, excepting a few feeble and intermitted efforts, we have done nothing but defraud, and oppress, and waste them, he seems now to be taking from us the opportunity of performing this work of mercy, and is calling them to the judgment, not to testify to our beneficence and paternal care, but to our persevering indifference and wrongs. Never did another christian people have so noble a race of savage men placed so within their reach and control, to whom they might impart the blessings of civilization and Christianity, and whom they might preserve to all future ages, a monument of the elevating and improving tendency of their arts, and the purifying and saving efficacy of their religion. How have we executed this philanthropic trust? Go back and search for the many tribes which covered New England and the Middle and Southern States two centuries ago, and which by contact with us have vanished from the earth like the morning dew,—and there find a reply. Instead of remaining, honorable monuments of our good faith and guardian care, the story of their wrongs and extermination must go down to all future ages, a memorial of our perfidy and abuse. What true friend of his country but must weep at the thought, how great our honor might have been, and how great our shame is!

But, even at this late day, we must do what we can. A few remain. Let us, as far as possible, make amends for past neglect, by increased exertions in future. If they are all to be hurried from the earth, and after an age or two more, not a tribe is to remain, let us offer Christ and salvation to as many as we can reach, hoping to prepare a remnant, at least, to enter a better land above, and thus mitigate the curse which impends over us for our past injustice and neglected duty.

But it is said daily, Do what you will for the Indian, he will be an Indian still. If it is meant that their habits and character cannot be changed in a year, or completely in a single generation, it may be true; and so it is true of every other race of men. But if it be meant that a persevering course of kindness and instruction will not effect this change, the implied charge is both unphilosophical and unchristian, and it is in opposition to historical facts. What band of savage men were ever more rapidly and thoroughly transformed in character and habits, than Elliot's colony at Natick? The Stockbridge Indians, a large portion of the Senecas and Tuscaroras, the Cherokees and the Choctaws, are living examples of this transformation. Men who bring this charge, expect too much, and expect it too soon; without reflecting how entire the change must be, in taste, estimates of things, habits, prejudices and prepossessions; and without reflecting how ill-adapted, inadequate, and intermitted have been the means used to effect the change. It is fairly questionable whether any race of men were ever more able to understand the disadvantages of their own habits and manner of life, or more ready to adopt a change which appeared to them practicable, than are the North American Indians.